

THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL'S.

In the discussions on the decoration of St. Paul's, which I have read with intense interest, one question seems hitherto overlooked, on which it seems to me that the whole decorative treatment must hang. To what use is it anticipated that the chief parts of the fabric will be applied, and how? It surely cannot for a moment be thought that the present fitting up and occupation (or rather disoccupation) of the interior is final or permanent. St. Paul's is a pile having all but the permanence of a pyramid. Can any one suppose it is to continue from age to age with only one extremity of one wing used? Its spaciousness and height must be turned to better account than a show,—either to make patent shot, or paint floor-cloths, or read the Koran; or say mass, or some other purpose conducive to man's comfort or God's glory, who never, as I believe, intended any two acres of earth to be lumbered in the way these two acres now are.

How can we decorate till we have some understanding what it is, or what it will be, that we are decorating? Until this is somewhat settled, I do not even believe Archdeacon Hale can raise the sum he names, or anything approaching it, for decoration. He may get 20,000*l.* for erecting or filling a Walkhalla, and 20,000*l.* more towards decorating a church. The public will give cheerfully to any object they can cheerfully admire or understand. But they cannot at present understand this great empty building. It is only a puzzle to them. The mystery of its existence,—its meaning,—must first be solved, and then, Sir, I believe the decorative difficulties will solve themselves.

Now, St. Paul's is a most unique building,—unique in more ways probably than any other ever built,—the last of cathedrals by a long interval,—one born out of due time by near two centuries,—yet wistful the most quickly built and most solid of any, containing more matter than any, save one, yet far less mind than any; the brainwork of but one man, instead of scores or even hundreds,—one giant, indeed; but no giant area can do the work of an army, or provide a feast of that abundance which constitutes the exhaustless interest of an old Christian temple;—unique, moreover, as the one splendid church of a period of shabby church work,—the one stop-gap apparently run up to compound for honouring in all else the dwelling above the temple,—to compound for the tax of church adornment, for that age at least. Its many peculiarities all centre and may be embraced in one,—that it was the only cathedral built for fashion; not for any of the ends,—devotion, expiation, priestcraft,—not by any of the means,—love, fear, superstition,—for and by which others had sprung up in the cathedral-building times; but by and for fashion, for the reason we wear chimney-pot beavers, and have corns, and short-lived, wasp-waisted people, and starved seamstresses, &c. &c. &c.;—for fear of being thought no richer than our neighbours.

"John, dear, I am glad you have ordered the globes. It looks so, to be without globes. But would you believe it? the careless creatures sent two that were not a pair,—quite different patterns!" This is an epitome of what happened to the Bulls when their town house was burnt, and, among other losses, was a family heirloom called the cathedral (then used to hold lumber). "John, dear," said Mrs. Bull, "we must have a new cathedral. It looks so, to be without one—and in this great house too! What would the Crapauds say? So I have ordered one of Mr. Christophers; and what do you think that apostate had the insolence to suggest?—That we could do very well with a trumpet square thing hardly longer than that old-fashioned great-grandfather's affair in Oxfordshire (which I am glad you have put away in the school-room, where the servants do not go; and I am sure I am ashamed *to* even the poor domestic to see it.) Now, don't be persuaded into this, dear. People will set it down at once that the fire has ruined *us*. If Mr. Christophers can do the job, well. We go to him for his work—not his advice. Show yourself a man of taste and spirit, Mr. Bull, and soar above his narrow

utilitarian views." So poor Mr. Bull, not being of the class of the rich poor (as Punch hath it), but of the other class, the poor poor, could no more afford to be without a full-sized cathedral of 500 feet long, with aisles, chapels, dome of the latest fashion, and all appurtenances (which neither he nor any one belonging to him knows what to do with), than you or I can afford to walk about, Sir, with heads unchimney-potted.

Mr. Bull found out his mistake ere the work was finished, as he has since done in many similar cases, though ashamed to confess it. All this zeal in the service of fashion, which at first as far outstrips the slow beginnings of a mediæval church as the hare did the tortoise, somehow always cools down before getting through one of these long jobs,—always breaks down at some point (in this case at the decoration), and most provokingly just fails of its object,—just fails to keep up appearances throughout, and leaves something or other not even decently respectable,—something evidently starved (like the windows, or empty panels, or painted apex),—something meant to be showy, and left shabby,—giving one peep behind the scenes, and ruining all. Fashion has never yet carried out a single great monument decently throughout, and, I believe, never will. You will say: are not most mediæval works incomplete too? Certainly; but their incompleteness involves no shabbiness;—it lets out nothing; for where everything is real, there is nothing to let out. It is only where the dress is a disguise that absolute completeness is essential. It is only in sham art that everything unfinished is a "break-down," and spoils the whole "effect."

Well, Mr. Bull, you can say he has a cathedral,—a cathedral of his own, not inherited from his father; and he has a dome,—a dome bigger than the Crapauda can show by six yards, and second only to that built by the other Bulls over the Alps; and he has paintings in it, all his own and paid for. No matter that he does not know what to do with his cathedral: no matter that the dome is so dark it repels all eyes,—is never looked at hut from curiosity, and only seen *negatively*, like the spots on the sun, or the starless apertures in southern constellations: no matter that the paintings cannot be seen at all (which Mr. Cockerell says is a reason for restoring them!); no matter,—there they are, all paid for, and Mr. Bull can show the receipts. Well, let him frame and glaze them, and hang them up in the best lighted part of the interior. They will save the expense of restoration,—do instead of either light or paintings, and the purpose of both building and decorations will be answered. For if the mediævals thought ornament was "to make us happy," they were dreaming, and so was Roskin to tell us so. Mr. Bull knows better. The use of ornament is to give an air of respectability,—to give your neighbours a favourable impression of the length of your purse; and this can only be done in two ways, by showing how much human labour you can afford to use, or how much you can afford to waste. Now the first method is troublesome, requiring both thought on the spender's part and art on the designer's. Where these commodities, therefore, are scarce, much is saved by adopting the second method. Besides, many think it nobler, and are more impressed by it; and here lay the error of Wren's first designs. It was not that he grudged expense (he was an economist, indeed, in the original, but not in the modern perverted sense): he would have thought no sum too large that Mr. Bull thought proper for the purpose, but he was for using his reason (in the plan and arrangement, at least: we have yet to attempt it in details): he was for using whatever was spent, wasting none, applying it all well and wisely, not to superfluities. But here he was expecting too much confidence. Mr. Bull had not faith enough in his architect to believe he could make a half-sized cathedral as noble as so respectable as his neighbours' full-sized ones. "No," said he, "there is nothing like a superfluous acre or two of roof and a thousand or two tons of stone." We know what these can do, but so few the wretched Wrenians, we may go farther and fare worse (for

Mr. Bull has more faith in acres and tons than in any man's abilities). He was afraid, if he let the money show itself quite in Wren's own way it would be such a refined and original way, that the Crapauds might not appreciate it,—at least, not at the first coup d'œil, which is everything in matters of fashion or respectability. The modern architect is a *modiste* in building, as the modern tailor is in dress; and the principles of *modism* are identical, to whatever they may be applied, and whether by the many, to counterfeits the marks of those above us faster than they can change them, or by the few to change their marks faster than those below can counterfeit them. On both sides of the game it is a principle that nothing can redeem the effect of a mean first impression. Now, a first impression is not arrived at by logic. We do not begin by estimating the waste in a dress or a building, and then judge of the owner's ability to waste accordingly. It is not conclusions arrived at by reflection, that decide us on the respectability or *ton* of either, but only those imbibed at a glance, by instinctive unobserved associations with something of similar appearance, and the length of purse which that appearance is known, at the particular time, to accompany. Hence, it is not enough merely to waste means: you must waste them in the particular modes that happen today to be associated with ability to waste, and recognised at a glance as indications thereof. This is the reason my proposal of the framed and glazed receipts would not answer, and also one reason, as I take it, why all hats are alike, and all Corinthian capitals. Another reason, however (in the case of dress at least) is, that we may not be all laughing at each other, an inconvenience that would be inevitable if we all displayed different marks of respectability.

Well, then, seeing that Mr. Bull has spent all he is ever likely to spend on the respectability of his cathedral as a show, a vast sacrifice to fashion (surely the most stupendous and durable ever made),—seeing he has enough to do to keep up the respectability of other works of this nature, more recent, and therefore more striking; suppose we plied him on other grounds. Buildings do not always retain the destination with which they were begun, and we have here the rare case of one whose architect *did not intend* it to do so. Of its owners indeed, one, James II. meant it for a Romanist church, and the rest for a show; two purposes not quite incompatible; and between the two,—prince and mob,—Wren, who was a man not only far in advance of both, but in advance of this year 1852, had a hard job to make his plan applicable, *at all*, to the purpose for which he designed, and to which he foresaw it must sooner or later be applied. However, that deep foresight which provided a passage through St. Magnus's steeple because he saw a future age would want it, provided also for the permanent opening and use of this remarkable monument after it should have earned the follies of his day,—for its use as neither a real nor a sham Romanist temple, a Walkhalla, a show-room, nor a gallery. With infinite pains he satisfied at once three objects in its construction,—the mob's, the king's, and his own,—his own, as he well knew, the only one that a coming age would recognise or care for. Left to himself, he would have given us something like the most convenient and largest church that Protestants could use, with all real splendour, and no superfluities,—with no pillars in the auditorium, no seats out of sight or hearing, but plenty of space and height, and the largest vestibules and accessories that could retain the subordinate character of accessories. Take one of his earlier designs, or knock off, from the present, all its nave and choir except the first compartment of each, and finish them like the transept arms, at the same distance from the centre; and you have the largest temple we could use, and the fittest for us. To prove this, draw the figure which, according to Isaac's experiments, defines the distance to which the voice can reach audibly. (It resembles a gibbous moon, in which the whole curve situated before the speaker is a portion of a circle of 75 feet radius,